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Arabic dialects in Turkey — towards a comparative typology

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(Nürnberg)

In a workshop devoted to Turkish dialects it is my pleasure to present a short survey of the dialectology of a language which is also spoken on the territory of Turkey and offers considerable dialect variation, namely Arabic.

Turkey is bordering on two Arab states, namely Syria and Iraq, and therefore the Turkish and the Arabic language areas are touching on the southern and southeastern Turkish border. Of course linguistic borders are never as clear-cut as political ones. Thus a Turkish audience will probably not have to be reminded of the existence of a considerable Turkish-speaking minority in northern Iraq, the so-called Türkmen in the region of Kerkük and Erbil. Ever since the times of Atatürk the Turkish Republic has regularly pointed to the existence of this ethnic group for which it feels a certain responsibility, and since the beginning of the war in Iraq awareness of this Turkish minority has again increased. On the other hand, the various Arabic-speaking populations inside Turkey have never received much attention, neither from the Turkish side nor, for that matter, from the Arab side. In the Arab states there seems to be no awareness at all of such important Arabic dialects as those of Mardin or Siirt, to mention just two of them. Considering this general lack of interest and the difficulties surrounding linguistic fieldwork in Turkey, the state of research into the Arabic dialects of Turkey is not bad at all. Although the dialects east of Diyarbakir were investigated almost single-handedly by the present author - and later by some of his students - we now have, after several decades of research and publication, a fairly good coverage of the whole area. In the last few years, an equally comprehensive investigation was carried out in the regions of Çukurova and Hatay, by Stephan Procházka and Werner Arnold, respectively (see bibliography).

I shall start with a short geographical survey of the Arabic dialects

spoken in Turkey (see figure a) and then describe a few interesting typological features found in these dialects. A word of caution, however, is needed at the beginning. Although I speak about “contemporary” dialects, most of which I have personally witnessed, this does not mean that all of these idioms can still be found spoken *in situ*, nor in fact that they are still being spoken at all. The very rich linguistic panorama which Turkey offered at the beginning of the 20th century has by now been largely destroyed. As far as the Arabic dialects are concerned one has to distinguish three categories, according to the date on which those dialects became endangered. The first category comprises dialects which were spoken exclusively by Christians and came close to extinction already during the First World War, as a result of the massacres of the Armenians and other Christian groups. The majority of these idioms is irretrievably lost, and only a few could be partly salvaged with the help of survivors. The second category comprises dialects which remained *in situ* until the middle of the 20th century and then gradually disappeared due to the emigration of the speakers. These dialects were spoken by those Christians who had survived the First World War massacres, and by Jews. The emigration of the Christians was triggered by a resumed, or in fact never interrupted, persecution of Christian minorities. The speakers of these dialects now live in Europe by the thousands, and therefore some of their dialects are still easily accessible to research but doomed to become extinct in a few decades. The Jews were not persecuted like the Christians but they also suffered some measure of discrimination. After the State of Israel was established in 1948 most of them emigrated to Israel. Linguistically their fate is similar to that of the Christians, in other words, in a few decades from now their specific idioms will be irretrievably lost. The third category comprises the Muslim Arabic dialects; most of them are still to be found *in situ* since there was no persecution of Muslims, but they are subjected to an ever increasing pressure for assimilation and therefore are not likely to survive the next one or two generations.

a) Survey of Arabic dialects spoken in Turkey

- 1 Syrian sedentary Arabic
Hatay
Mersin, Adana
- 2 Syrian Bedouin Arabic
Urfa

- 3 Mesopotamian Arabic (*qəltu* dialects)
 - 3.1 Mardin group
 - Mardin town (Muslims; Christians, emigrated)
 - Mardin villages (Muslims; Christians, emigrated)
 - Plain of Mardin (Muslims; Christians, extinct)
 - Kōsa* and *Mḥallami* dialects (Muslims)
 - Āzax* (Christians, now emigrated)
 - Nusaybin and Cizre (Jews, now emigrated)
 - 3.2 Siirt group
 - Siirt town (Muslims; Christians, extinct)
 - Siirt villages (Muslims)
 - 3.3 Diyarbakir group
 - Diyarbakir town (Christians, extinct; Jews, emigrated)
 - Diyarbakir villages (Christians, extinct)
 - Diyarbakir, Siverek, Çermik, Urfa (Jews, emigrated)
 - 3.4 Kozluk-Sason-Muy group
 - Kozluk (Muslims; Christians extinct?)
 - Sason (Muslims; Christians extinct?)
 - Muş (Muslims; Christians extinct?)

The Arabic dialects listed under 1 are spoken in the Turkish provinces of Hatay, Adana and Mersin, thus in areas bordering on the Mediterranean. Hatay belonged to Syria until 1939 and was known as the *Liva of Iskenderun*. In 1939 it was annexed by Turkey. The capital of the province, Hatay, is better known under the traditional name of Antakya, which is the *Antioch* of antiquity. Hatay province today has a Turkish-speaking majority, but Arabic is spoken in about one hundred localities throughout the province. It is spoken by Bedouin, rural populations and townspeople, and by members of every religious denomination existing in the area, namely by Alevis, Sunni Muslims, Greek Orthodox Christians and Jews. The Alevis constitute the largest of these groups. Dialect variation within this area is very remarkable and is the subject of a recent book by Werner Arnold: *Die arabischen Dialekte Antiochiens* (1998). In terms of dialect geography the Arabic dialects of Hatay province can be seen as a continuation of the dialects spoken in the adjacent Syrian area of *Jabal al-Ansariye*, a mountainous region inhabited predominantly by

Alevis. Migration of Arabic-speaking Alevis from this area has spread beyond Hatay province and has reached the coastal area of *Çukurova* further to the west. In the three large cities Adana, Tarsus and Mersin (*Içel*) Arabic is still spoken by a minority, and some 50 villages extending between these three towns and along the Seyhan river are still considered arabophone. The Arabic dialects of this region have likewise been the subject of a recent study by Stephan Procházka: *Die arabischen Dialekte der Çukurova (Südtürkei)* (2002). Again, as in Hatay province, the large majority of the Arabic speakers is made up by Alevis, but some smaller communities of Sunni Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians are also to be found. As pointed out, all the Arabic dialects spoken in this Mediterranean region of Turkey are linguistically part and parcel of the Syrian Arabic dialect area.

Moving further to the east, we come upon Arabic dialects of the Bedouin type which are spoken in Urfa province in areas adjacent to the Syrian border (listed under nr. 2 in the survey). These dialects have so far not been investigated in detail but they are considered to be a continuation of the Bedouin dialects spoken in the Syrian desert south of the border. At this point it is important to explain that in Syria, as in many Arabic-speaking countries, there is a striking difference between the dialects spoken by the population of towns and villages » called sedentary dialects » and the dialects of the original Bedouin tribes. Although most Bedouins have been settled in the course of the 20th century and do not roam the desert any longer, the difference in speech has been maintained to this day. In Syria the western part of the country, including all the major cities, speaks sedentary dialects but the whole eastern part, made up by desert and steppe, is the area of Bedouin Arabic. One of the most striking differences between sedentary and Bedouin Arabic dialects is the treatment of a particular Old Arabic consonant, namely the uvular stop *q*, expressed by the letter *qāf* in Arabic writing. In sedentary dialects this consonant is always represented by a voiceless sound, either *q* itself or - more frequently - a glottal stop ' (see figure b):

b) Reflexes of Old Arabic *qāf*

Old Arabic:	<i>q</i>	<i>qāl</i> „he said“
Sedentary dialects:	<i>q</i> ~ ' <i>qāl</i> ~ 'āl	
Bedouin dialects;	<i>g</i>	<i>gāl</i> ~ <i>gāl</i>

It is thus very interesting to observe that these two major types of Arabic encountered in Syria are likewise reflected in the Arabic-speaking areas of Turkey: Hatay, Adana and Mersin have sedentary dialect types but Urfa has a Bedouin type.

Far more interesting, from the point of view of Arabic dialectology, than these two groups which can be viewed as an extension of the Syrian dialect area, either sedentary or Bedouin, are those dialects which are found further in the east of Turkey, in the provinces of Mardin, Siirt and Diyarbakir. These dialects, as shall soon become clear, are part of the larger Mesopotamian dialect area, in other words they can be considered as a continuation of the Iraqi Arabic dialects. They are also called by the specific name of *qəltu* dialects. What does this expression mean, and why are these dialects so interesting? In order to answer that question we have to make a short excursion into the history of Arabic dialectology.

In 1964 a book by Haim Blanc with the title *Communal Dialects in Baghdad* appeared at Harvard University Press. This small book of only 170 pages of text is no doubt one of the most brilliant works ever written in Arabic dialectology. The title refers to the three most important religious communities which existed in Baghdad until 1950, namely Muslims, Jews and Christians. These communities, although living in the same town, were speaking three radically different dialects. The main division, however, was between the Muslim dialect on the one hand, and the Jewish and Christian dialects on the other. Based on the word for „I said“ - *qultu* in Classical Arabic - Blanc called the Jewish and Christian dialects *qəltu* dialects and the Muslim dialect a *gilit* dialect (see figure c):

c) Communal dialects in Baghdad

Jewish Baghdadi: *qəltu* „I said“

Christian Baghdadi: *qəltu*

Muslim Baghdadi: *gilit* „I said“

In the light of what I said about the reflexes of Old Arabic *qāf* one can easily recognize the fact that Muslim Baghdadi is basically a Bedouin dialect, but Jewish and Christian Baghdadi belong to the sedentary type. In a brilliant argument based both on dialectological findings and on the history of Iraq, Haim Blanc was able to show that the dialects of the Jews

and Christians continue the older type of Mesopotamian Arabic as it was spoken by the sedentary population in the time of the Abbasid caliphs, whereas Muslim Baghdadi was introduced into the city at a much later time, namely during the Ottoman Empire, when Bedouins gradually occupied the country. Although his book was mainly concerned with Baghdad, Blanc went on to show that the whole of Iraq is characterized by this dichotomy, in other words by the sharp division between *qəltu* and *gilit* dialects. The *qəltu* dialects, being the older linguistic stratum, have been pushed back by the more recent *gilit* dialects but are still spoken by the religious minorities. Furthermore, they have retained some strongholds in northern Iraq, for instance the town of Mossul, and, what is important for our subject, Blanc went on to say that the *qəltu* dialects did not stop at the Iraqi-Turkish border but in fact continued into Turkish territory. He mentioned the towns of Mardin and Siirt as places where *qəltu* dialects were still spoken. This short passage in Blanc's book gave me the idea to go to Turkey and try to do the kind of research which Blanc had done for Iraq. Thus, after receiving my PhD in 1967, I went to southeastern Turkey for two years of fieldwork on the *qəltu* dialects. I was able to accumulate a large amount of data, so large in fact that to this day my corpus has not yet been completely published.

The survey in figure a) lists, under nr. 3, four main groups as Mesopotamian Arabic or *qəltu* dialects, with a number of subgroups and individual place names. The vast majority of these dialects has been discovered and first published by the present author, only the dialect of Mardin (3.1) has been known for over 120 years, having first been described in an isolated article by Albert Socin in 1882. In the survey I have marked whether the speakers are still to be found *in situ* or not. The remark „extinct“ refers to those Christian populations which were massacred already during the First World War; in some cases I was able to find old people who had survived as children and could still speak the dialect to some extent. The remark „emigrated“ refers to the Christians and Jews who emigrated during the second half of the 20th century. The populations who are still more or less preserved in their old places are all Muslim.

The first place I went to for my fieldwork was Mardin (Arabic *Mərdīn*). In this beautiful city on a mountain slope, overlooking the plain below all the way to the Syrian border, I spent a total of six months. Mardin Arabic

is the most „classical“ of all the *qəltu* dialects in Turkey and thus a very good starting point for comparative research. When I lived in Mardin in the late sixties there was still a small community of local Christians, and on a recent visit I was able to ascertain that there are still Christians living there, but the majority is made up of Arabic-speaking Muslims; they, in turn, are now probably outnumbered by the Kurds who have settled in the town. East of Mardin there are about 50 Arabic-speaking villages of the *Kōsa* and *Mhallami* tribes. It is said that these populations were Aramaic-speaking Christians until the 16th century when they collectively converted to Islam and adopted Arabic as their language. Their Arabic dialect still contains a number of Aramaic expressions. There is one Mhallami dialect which I studied in particular detail, the dialect of the village of Kinderib (Arabic *Kəndēr_b*, Turkish name *Söğütlü*). In 2003 I published a large collection of texts from this village and in 2005, as a companion volume, a glossary. To the east of Mardin province there is a small town called Azex (Arabic *Āzəx*, Turkish name *İdil*) which was inhabited exclusively by Christians. I went there on several occasions to study the dialect which is quite distinct from Mardin Arabic. One of its hallmarks is the shift of interdental to sibilants, thus instead of *tātē* „three“ they say *sāse*. (I shall return to this phonetic question presently). The dialect of Azex was described in detail by my student Michaela Wittrich; her book appeared in 2001.

From Mardin and the dialects of Mardin province I then turned to Siirt. The Siirt group (3.2) is a small dialect group comprising only the town and six neighbouring villages. The Arabic of this group is very different from Mardin, thus for instance the interdental is shifted to labiodentals, and the word for „three“ is pronounced *fāfe*. I was the first person to describe this dialect and to publish texts from Siirt and two of its villages. In Siirt there existed a large Christian community until the First World War, they even had their own bishop. There is reason to believe, however, that these Christians did not speak Arabic but Aramaic, in any case they were wiped out so completely that no trace whatsoever remained, and I never was able to find a single surviving Christian from that area. The third group to which I turned after investigating the Siirt area is named after the large town of Diyarbakir (3.3). In contrast to the previous two groups the whole Diyarbakir group does not exist any longer. It was the westernmost part of the Arabic language area in southeastern Turkey and comprised only

dialects spoken by Christian and Jewish communities, there were no Arabic-speaking Muslims in that area. The Christians who lived in the town of Diyarbakir and a few surrounding villages fell victims to the Armenian massacres in 1915; I was able to interview a few survivors, then very old, in 1967, and published a number of text with authentic narratives of the massacres that took place in and around Diyarbakir. There was also a Jewish community in Diyarbakir, as there was in Siverek, Çermik and Urfa, places where no Arab Christians lived. The Jews have emigrated wholesale to Israel, many of them even before the State of Israel was founded in 1948. This means that the respective dialects ceased to be spoken *in situ* some sixty or seventy years ago. Again, some speakers could be interviewed in Israel in the last decades, but by now all these dialects have to be considered extinct, in other words, all the Arabic dialects spoken between Diyarbakir and Urfa are now history.

The same may in part be true for the last group, the Kozluk-Sason-Muş dialects (1.4). These dialects are situated in a forbidding mountain range which extends from Siirt northwards to the plain of Muş. They have for the most part not yet been investigated. Most of the dialects still existing are spoken by Muslim peasants in small villages and hamlets which, intriguingly, bear Armenian names » but no Armenians survive in the area. There is evidence that along with the Armenians there were also Arabic-speaking Christians in the area, for instance in a place called Mutki, but no surviving speaker has ever been found. The only dialect of this group which so far has been described is that of Hasköy (Talay 2002).

The whole of the Mesopotamian or *qəltu* dialects spoken in Turkey is very archaic. This is shown already by the word *qəltu* itself. So far we only noticed that this form demonstrates the voiceless pronunciation of the Old Arabic uvular stop *q*. However, the word also testifies to another very unusual feature, namely the preservation of the final vowel *-u* in the suffix of the 1. pers. sg. of the so-called Arabic perfect or past tense. The classical Arabic form - like *qultu* „I said“ or *katabtu* „I wrote“ - has lost the final vowel in almost all modern dialects, compare, e.g., (figure d):

d) 1. pers. sg. perfect in modern Arabic dialects

Damascus Arabic:	<i>ʔəlʔt</i>	„I said“
Cairo Arabic:	<i>ʔult</i>	
Muslim Baghdadi:	<i>gilīt</i>	

Mardin Arabic

qəltu

Although all the *qəltu* dialects are very archaic, the linguistic differences between the various groups are quite considerable. During my stay in Mardin I got acquainted with some high school boys who also served as my informants. Among them there was a single student who was native of Siirt. Although the boys among themselves spoke Mardin Arabic, this boy conversed with them in Turkish because both parties found it difficult to understand each other's dialect. On the phonological level, the differences between the various subgroups of Anatolian *qəltu* dialects can be illustrated by the sound changes involving the Arabic interdentals, a fact to which I already referred in passing (see figure e). The starting point are the three interdental fricatives *t̪* (voiceless), *d̪* (voiced) and *d̪ʔ* (voiced emphatic; this latter sound represents two Old Arabic consonants, *ḏād* and *ẓā*). They have been preserved in most dialects of the Mardin group but have been shifted to sibilants in Azex and in the Kozluk-Sason-Muş group, to labiodentals in the Siirt group and to dental stops in the Diyarbakir group.

e) Reflexes of Arabic interdentals in the *qəltu* dialects

	<u>Mardin Azəx</u>		<u>Siirt</u>	<u>Diyarbakir</u>
* <i>t̪</i>	<i>t̪əte</i>	<i>s̪əse</i>	<i>f̪əfe</i>	<i>tl̪əte</i> „three“
* <i>d̪</i>	<i>axad̪</i>	<i>axaz̪</i>	<i>axav</i>	<i>axad</i> „he took“
* <i>d̪ʔ</i>	<i>d̪ʔarab</i>	<i>z̪arab</i>	<i>v̪ʔarab</i>	<i>ḏarab</i> „he shot“

It is interesting to compare the development of the interdentals in the *qəltu* dialects with those in the Arab world as a whole. In the Arab world we find either preservation of the interdentals or their shift to dental stops (cf., e.g., Damascus Arabic *tl̪əte*, *axad*, *ḏarab*). A shift to sibilants (as in Azex) is also found but is much less frequent, whereas the shift to labiodentals (as in Siirt) is very rare and has not been observed as a general sound shift. Thus the Anatolian Arabic dialects in this respect show a greater variation than Arabic dialects as a whole.

One of the most characteristic features in the phonology of *qəltu* Arabic is the so-called *imāla*, which means the raising of the long *ā* vowel to a closed *ē*, a sound shift triggered by the presence of an *i* vowel, either short or long, in the preceding or following syllable. This is basically a

phenomenon similar to the „Umlaut“ in Germanic languages, e.g., German *Mann*, pl. *Männer* or *Kahn*, pl. *Kähne*. This kind of imala is very old in Arabic as it was described by the Arab grammarians of the Middle Ages; now it only survives in the *qəltu* dialects. Thus the Arabic plural *dakākīn* „shops“ (from the sg. *dukkān* „shop“) yields *dakēkīn* by way of *imāla*. When the *imāla* has been triggered by a short *i* this vowel may have subsequently been lost, e.g. *klēb* „dogs“ which is derived from the Old Arabic plural *kilāb* (see figure f):

f) *imāla* (*ā > ē) in the *qəltu* dialects

<u>Old Arabic</u>	<u><i>qəltu</i> dialects</u>
<i>dakākīn</i> >	<i>dakēkīn</i> „shops“
<i>kilāb</i> >	<i>klēb</i> „dogs“

The uniqueness of this type of imala is evident when comparing it to the *imāla* obtaining in some Arabic dialects of the eastern Mediterranean coast, e.g., Lebanese. In Lebanese the *imāla* is unconditioned, i.e. not triggered by an *i* vowel, cf. (figure g):

g) Differently conditioned *imāla* in Lebanese:

<u>Old Arabic</u>	<u><i>qəltu</i> dialects</u>	<u>Lebanese</u>
<i>kilāb</i>	<i>klēb</i>	<i>klāb</i> „dogs“
<i>ʾaktāf</i>	<i>ktāf</i>	<i>ktāf</i> „shoulders“

Summary.

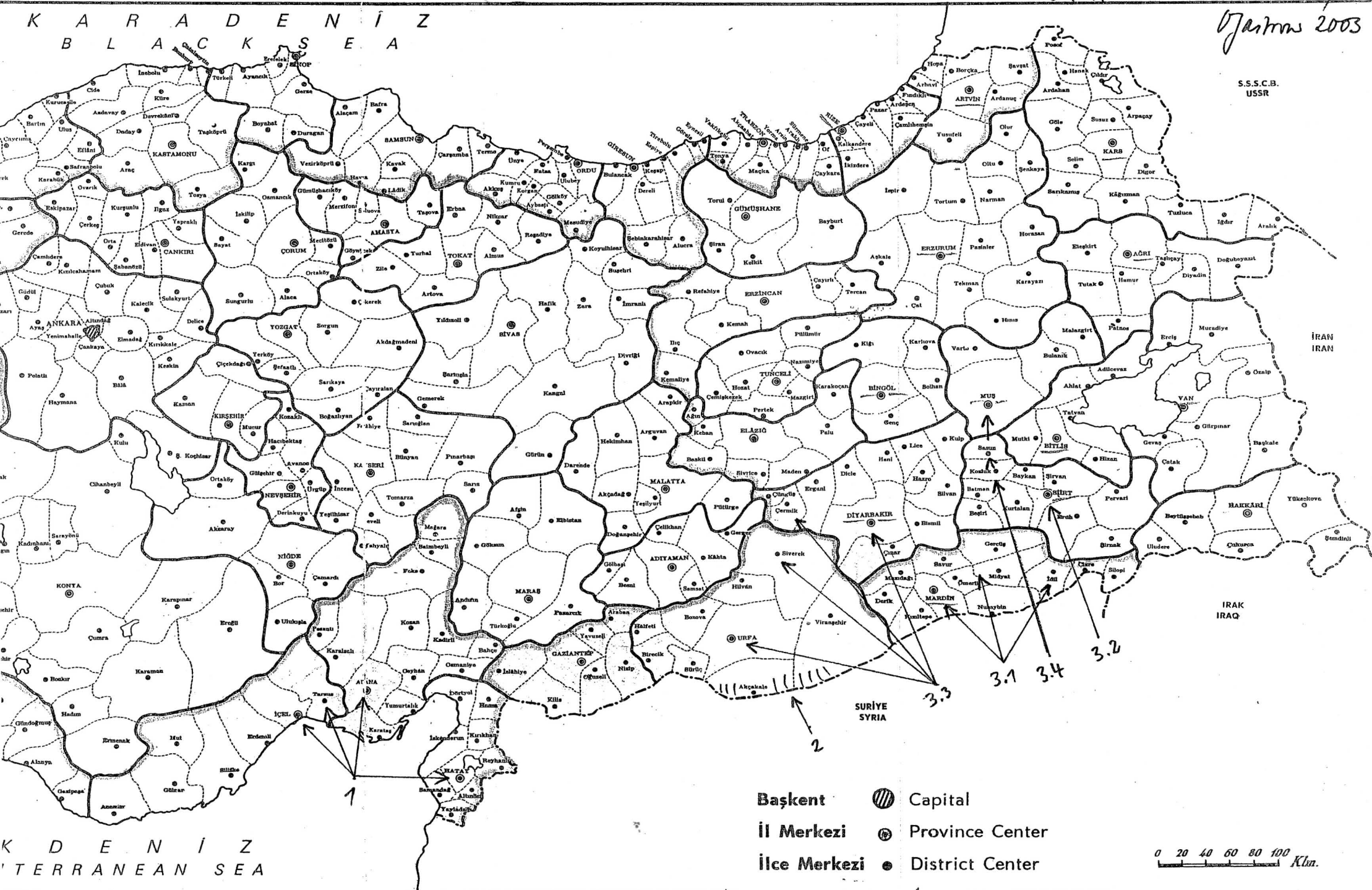
Turkey, as my paper has tried to show, has three areas where Arabic dialects are spoken, namely the Mersin-Adana-Hatay region, the Urfa region and the Diyarbakir-Mardin-Siirt region. The Arabic dialects of each of these regions belong to a different branch of Arabic: to Syrian sedentary Arabic, to Bedouin Arabic and to Mesopotamian sedentary Arabic. Although all these dialects are equally interesting I have, in part for personal reasons, put most of the emphasis on the Mesopotamian or *qəltu* dialects found in the Diyarbakir-Mardin-Siirt region. These dialects are remnants of a very old language stratum, a historical stage of Arabic which in Iraq itself has been largely pushed back and replaced by the more modern *gilit* dialects. Therefore the Arabic language islands in southeastern Turkey are linguistic monuments of great historical value. Some of them, unfortunately, have already become extinct and others are

likely to disappear in the near future. But an impressive number of them has been investigated and published and thus been preserved as linguistic documents. The most important of these publications are listed in the bibliography. In addition, there is now a possibility to listen on the internet to a large number of texts in the dialects discussed. *Semitisches Tonarchiv* (Semitic Sound Archive) which was founded by Professor Werner Arnold at the University of Heidelberg contains at present (autumn 2005) more than 1500 recorded texts in various modern Semitic idioms, among them many Arabic dialect samples from Çukurova and the Diyarbakir-Mardin-Siirt region. The internet address is *semarch@uni-hd.de*

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